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Bush Continues To Lead Republican Primary Field in New Hampshire

For more information, contact Andrew Smith, UNH Survey Center, at 603-862-4367. Results also will be available at the center Web Site, at <http://www.unh.edu/ipssr/survey-center/index.html>

By Carmelle Druchniak
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- George W. Bush has maintained his lead over the Republican primary field in New Hampshire. Elizabeth Dole, John McCain, and Steve Forbes are vying for the second slot and the remaining candidates are picking up little support. Bush also has strong positive name recognition among New Hampshire Republicans.

These findings are based on the latest WMUR / CNN Poll, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. The WMUR / CNN Poll is sponsored by WMUR TV, Channel 9 in Manchester, New Hampshire and CNN. The poll was conducted Sept. 5-11, with a random sample of 702 likely New Hampshire primary voters interviewed by telephone. In 95 out of 100 cases, the statewide estimate will be accurate to plus or minus 3.7 percent.

With 5 months remaining until the New Hampshire first-in-the-nation Presidential Primary, Texas Gov. George W. Bush has increased his lead over his nearest rivals, Elizabeth Dole, Arizona Senator John McCain, and businessman Steve Forbes. Bush is currently favored by 45% of New Hampshire's likely Republican primary voters, Dole is favored by 15%, McCain is favored by 12%, and Forbes is favored by 10%.

In the May, 1999 WMUR / CNN Poll, George W. Bush was favored by 37% of likely Republican primary voters, Dole was favored by 16%, 14% favored McCain, and 6% favored Forbes.

"Bush has three important, self-reinforcing strengths: he has raised enormous amounts of campaign cash, much more than any of his GOP challengers, he has gotten the endorsement of more GOP elected officials than have his challengers, and he has better poll numbers than his challengers," says UNH Survey Center

Director Andrew Smith. He adds Bush's wide lead in money, endorsements, and the polls will make it very difficult for another Republican to defeat him in New Hampshire.

Dole's strong third place finish in the Iowa GOP Straw Poll has not translated into increased support in New Hampshire.

Among the other candidates vying for the Republican nomination, political commentator Pat Buchanan is favored by 5% of likely GOP primary voters, former UN Ambassador Alan Keyes is favored by 4%, former Vice President Dan Quayle is favored by 3%, Chairman of the Campaign for Working Families Gary Bauer is favored by 1%, Utah Senator Orrin Hatch is favored by 1%, 1% prefer some other candidate, and 3% say they are undecided.

Since the May, 1999 WMUR / CNN Poll, Lamar Alexander and John Kasich have dropped out of the race and New Hampshire Senator Bob Smith has quit the Republican Party. Pat Buchanan's inability to catch on with Republican voters has also led him to seriously consider abandoning the Republican Party for the Reform Party ticket. Dan Quayle has already closed up his campaign in Iowa to concentrate on New Hampshire, and his continuing low numbers here may lead him to also abandon his quest for the Presidency in 2000. Keyes and Bauer are likely to continue their quixotic pursuit of the nomination.

When asked who their second choice would be, the second tier candidates remain relatively unpopular when compared with Bush, Dole, McCain, and Forbes. Quayle is the second choice of 7% of GOP primary voters, 6% favor Buchanan, 3% favor Keyes, 1% favor Hatch, 6% prefer some other candidate, and 9% are undecided about a second choice.

Another indication of George W. Bush's strength in New Hampshire is the commitment of his supporters. Likely GOP primary voters were asked how strongly they supported their choice for the New Hampshire Primary. Among the leading candidates, Bush supporters are more likely to say they are certain to vote for their candidate than are the supporters of other candidates - 49% of Bush voters say they are certain to vote for Bush, 33% of Dole supporters are certain to vote for her, 47% of McCain supporters are certain to vote for him, and 38% of Forbes supporters are certain to vote for him.

When asked who their second choice would be, 24% of Granite State Republican primary voters said they

would vote for George W. Bush, 22% would vote for Elizabeth Dole, 12% would vote for John McCain, and 10% would vote for Steve Forbes.

Despite lingering questions about past drug use, George W. Bush has maintained very high favorability ratings among likely Republican primary voters -- 81% say they have a favorable opinion of Bush, 10% have an unfavorable opinion, 6% are neutral, and 2% say they don't know enough about him. Bush's net favorability rating (the percent favorable minus the percent unfavorable) stands at +71, virtually unchanged since the May, 1999 WMUR / CNN Poll when it stood at +70.

Elizabeth Dole has not been able to translate her high favorability ratings into votes. Seventy-eight percent of Granite State GOP primary voters say have a favorable opinion of Elizabeth Dole, 14% have an unfavorable opinion, 6% are neutral, and 2% don't know enough about her to say. Dole's net favorability rating of +64 is essentially unchanged since the May WMUR / CNN Poll when it was +63.

John McCain is viewed favorably by 53% of likely Republican primary voters, 11% have an unfavorable opinion, 9% are neutral, and 27% still say they don't know enough about him to say. His net favorability rating of +42 has moved little since May when it was +41.

Steve Forbes has increased his overall favorability since the May WMUR / CNN Poll, an indication that his early television advertisements have worked somewhat. In May, Forbes's net favorability rating stood at +22 and it has risen to +29 Alan Keyes (+25) and Orrin Hatch (+12), and Gary Bauer (+7) have low, but positive net favorability ratings while Dan Quayle (-1) and Pat Buchanan (-1) have seen their net favorability ratings decline even lower since the May WMUR / CNN Poll.

Many analysts have predicted deep divisions among Republicans over the abortion issue. However, the WMUR / CNN Poll shows that neither Bush nor Dole are significantly hurt or helped by the abortion issue. While Bush runs stronger among people who think that abortion should be legal in all circumstances (47% of whom support Bush), he currently gets 37% of the votes of Republicans who oppose all abortions and gets 46% of the votes of those who favor abortion only in limited circumstances. Similarly, there is no significant difference in the support that Dole receives depending on a person's position on abortion.

George W. Bush runs strongly with all subgroups of Republicans and is particularly popular among Republicans with post-graduate educations and lower income Republicans. Elizabeth Dole receives somewhat more support from women than men, but women are still more likely to support Bush. John McCain's strongest support comes from older Republicans, union households, and non-church goers.

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